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Wednesday 27 July 2005

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Mercredi 27 juillet 2005

Select committee on
electoral reform

Comité spécial de la
réforme électorale

Organization

Organisation



Chair: Caroline Di Cocco
Clerk: Anne Stokes

Présidente : Caroline Di Cocco
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

SELECT COMMITTEE ON
ELECTORAL REFORMCOMITÉ SPÉCIAL DE LA
RÉFORME ÉLECTORALE

Wednesday 27 July 2005

Mercredi 27 juillet 2005

The committee met at 0915 in committee room 1.

APPOINTMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE

The Chair (Ms. Caroline Di Cocco): First of all, I want to welcome all of you to this committee. This is the first meeting that we've had for this select committee on electoral reform.

I just want to give you a bit of background before we get into the discussions. Our membership, as you know, has been determined by the three party whips. I have been named as Chair and Norm Miller is our Vice-Chair.

Before we proceed, I would like to tell the committee that we have two members participating via teleconference today: Monique Smith and Richard Patten are on the line.

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): Hi.

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): Hello.

The Chair: I'd like to explain, though, that these two members may participate in all parts of the discussion today, but because of the rules of attendance they won't be permitted to move any motion or to vote should the occasion for a vote arise.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): Which members?

The Chair: Richard Patten and Monique Smith, two members of our committee.

Today, Linda Jeffrey is a substitute for Wayne Arthurs and Jennifer Mossop is a substitute for Monique Smith.

First of all, I'd like to deal with the first order of business, which is to elect a subcommittee on committee business. So I need a motion.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I'd like to move that a subcommittee on committee business be appointed to meet from time to time at the call of the Chair, or at the request of any member thereof, to consider and report to the committee on the business of the committee; that the presence of all members of the subcommittee is necessary to constitute a meeting; and that the subcommittee be composed of the following members: the Chair as Chair, Mr. Sterling, Mr. Prue and Ms. Smith, and that substitution be permitted on the subcommittee.

The Chair: Is there any discussion? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair: In front of you we have the copy of the mandate of the committee, as ordered by the House on June 13, 2005. This is the direction given to the committee by the House and provides the framework within which we must work. You'll note that the committee must report to the House no later than November 3 and has the authority to meet any time it wishes during recess or prorogation and while the House is sitting.

By the way, the committee has the authority to travel outside of Ontario pending budgetary approval by the Board of Internal Economy.

Mr. Patten: Fiji, Fiji.

The Chair: I didn't hear that, Richard.

First of all, I want to review this mandate. There is a distinction between what is required—"shall"—and the optional recommendation, which is "may."

If you take a look at the very first long paragraph, it says, "The committee shall, among other matters, review the current electoral system and alternative electoral systems." So I'd like to bring up for discussion how to review the current system, because that's the first order of business, it appears, by the mandate.

By the way, before I move forward, I'd like to introduce to you the clerk of our committee, Anne Stokes, and our legislative researcher, Larry Johnston.

I said if we wanted to discuss experts on electoral systems, Larry Johnston is considered an expert for a number of reasons. So I'm sure he can relay to you his expertise in this—

Interjection.

The Chair: And we can find others as well, absolutely.

I'd like to get a briefing by our research officer on this review of the current system. So could you give us a briefing on some of the discussions we've had on this.

Mr. Larry Johnston: I would draw to the members' attention a document that you will have received this morning called Criteria for Assessing Electoral Systems. This document looks at the exercise of how to assess electoral systems. It was my belief that the committee would need to make some decisions about what it values in an electoral system. This background paper provides some examples by looking at the criteria used by the royal commission in New Zealand and some criteria developed by the Law Reform Commission of Canada, it discusses the values that guided the discussion by the

people's assembly in British Columbia, and it looks at the values that were mandated for the Jenkins commission in the United Kingdom.

0920

The appendices to that document provide the assessment of the single-member-plurality, or first-past-the-post, system—which we have as our current system—under each of these sets of criteria, just for an example of how these bodies studying electoral reform applied the various criteria to assess the electoral system.

I think, at some point, the members of this committee will need to decide which criteria they value most importantly and proceed on that basis to assess the system. If necessary, we can bring in experts to give an objective view with whatever criteria the committee chooses.

Mr. Patten: Can I ask a question?

The Chair: Yes, Richard.

Mr. Patten: The background paper that you have, Larry, are you distributing that today at the committee?

Mr. Johnston: Yes, it's here today. We can certainly send you a copy electronically.

Mr. Patten: Great; thank you.

My question is, was there a similar committee in BC, select committee or otherwise? Prior to putting forward their referendum, or whatever it was, during the election, did they have such a committee from the Legislature perform something similar to what we're attempting to do here?

Mr. Johnston: It's my belief that they did not. The election campaign in British Columbia had promised a citizens' assembly, and the government immediately set up a citizens' assembly.

Mr. Patten: OK. Thank you.

The Chair: We have a number of things that we have to do that are really challenging. One is that we do have to have a sense of reviewing the current system. We also have to look at alternative systems to be reviewed, and we have to develop criteria on how we're going to do this.

I think that one of the values of having a select committee with legislators is that we have the practitioners who have voted in the electoral system. It gives us an opportunity, if you want, to compile a report that looks at electoral systems. When the citizens' assembly starts to do its work, then you've got both sides looking at the system: the practitioner as well as the public at large. Then we see that one can become a resource for the other. So I see the two of them as quite unique, and I think it's a very balanced approach in looking at electoral systems.

Mr. Sterling: One of the things that I think we must be mindful of is that we, as politicians, will be portrayed as trying to retain the status quo, or we may be perceived as picking one or the other of the alternatives. Given BC's experience in this area—basically, in talking to various people about the referendum that took place in BC, what I understand is that as soon as one of the parties—and in this case it was the NDP—started to fight

against a particular proposal that was put forward by the citizens' assembly there, the public immediately embraced the proposal. Therefore, the debate was perhaps coloured by the fact that politicians and parties started to enter the debate and were seen as making a choice which would favour them as opposed to the populace. An odd result, but that's the way some people interpret what happened in British Columbia.

Therefore, in terms of what I would view our function to be—and, ultimately, I don't think we will have the choice as to what the alternatives might or might not be in terms of any kind of movement—it is more to try to present from a practitioner's view the likely results of taking A, B, C or D in terms of our future electoral process.

The other part, too, is that I think there's been far too much emphasis on how politicians are elected and far too small an emphasis, or little emphasis, on the likely results of shifts of power and how decisions will be made as a result of picking A, B, C or D. So I think that, for me, a lot of what I want to make certain of is that when the citizens' assembly makes a recommendation, they also indicate to the public the likely results of their accepting or rejecting that particular recommendation.

The Chair: If I could just say, this committee, in my view, has a very specific mandate. You're absolutely right about not implying that we've got any kind of outcome that we're considering ahead of time. This is about reviewing some of these systems, possibly putting up—I see it very simply as laying out all the positive things that are there, all the negative things that are there, the opportunities.

You're absolutely right, Mr. Sterling, when you say that we have to look at the consequences of whatever systems we're going to review, the pros and cons, both with ours and with others. It's just a way for us to balance, if you want. We're not going in with any preconceived notions. I don't want this committee to feel that it is going in with any preconceived notions. We're not there.

We are truly on a journey to understand better how these systems work, what the pros and cons are, and provide an analysis of that and red flag what we feel are the things that may or may not be working and what is working, so that we have a better understanding. It's about evolving a system, at the end of the day, that is about better democracy and better government. That's sort of the altruistic reason that I see us doing this.

Mr. Sterling: Could I make a suggestion? I noticed in the summer issue of the Canadian Parliamentary Review that Hugh Segal, who is president of the Institute for Research on Public Policy, wrote a guest editorial. I had the clerk copy it for you, because I know that every one of you, upon receiving the Canadian Parliamentary Review, doesn't open it perhaps as quickly as some of the other mail we receive.

Mr. Segal brings forward some questions with regard to where there are some failures in our parliamentary system in terms of bringing innovative ideas forward and

that, generally speaking, members of the Legislature and members of Parliament don't have the opportunity to bring forward innovative ideas in terms of public policy.

I was wondering whether or not we should—I'd like the committee to have a discussion with Mr. Segal. I'd like to have a discussion with some other people who might have some insight and experience as to some of the thought process we might want to go forward with in terms of where we would like our Parliaments to improve. So I'm open to suggestions as to other people like Mr. Segal, who has, as I say, a lot of experience and is quite noted as an authority in this kind of area. I would really enjoy hearing an interchange between him and members of this committee.

0930

Ms. Wynne: I'd just like to make a comment—actually, it's a process question—in terms of what exactly we want to get accomplished today and what is the product we want to have at the end of today. We're talking about content, and I'm happy to have the content discussion, but I think we need—I certainly need—to get a grasp on what our meeting schedule is, what our work plan is. When will we have people come and talk to us? How are we going to go forward? Can I just get a sense from you or from the group of what the plan for this time is?

The Chair: I was just going to move to that, the process of reviewing the system. First of all, I'll do the overview with the timeline that we have of what our schedule is.

It appears that we have to have this report done by November 3. That means that the October time is really going to be for us to evolve the report and have it written, which means that September—and I understand that in August we have a number of members who are away because they've already made plans. Therefore, it appears that we have three weeks in September, the first three weeks of September, when this committee will embark on its research and therefore the travel.

That's sort of the broad brush of the timeline that we looked at to make it possible for us to have the report done by November 3. Does anybody have any comments about that?

Ms. Wynne: I have a question about the assumption of travel. I guess for me, because I'm new at this—I will declare that up front—and because we're not engineers going to look at bridges, I have a question about going places as opposed to bringing people here, for example, to hear what they have to say. To a large extent, this is an intellectual exercise, and I just need to understand from people who are more experienced than I the assumption of travel.

The Chair: I'm going to respond to that. Three or four years ago, the Legislative Assembly committee travelled to Great Britain. The value of travel is greatly underestimated when it comes to the impact it can have on what you learn. If you're able to go to a place that's having an election, where you can see an outcome and you can talk to the people who are the equivalent of Elections Ontario, let's say, I found it invaluable, because

you get a different perspective. You see the nuances that just are not there when it comes to the academic research.

My own opinion and my own experience are that what you read and how it actually plays out are different. It's probably one of the only things—engineers know, "This is how you build a bridge, and I'm going to see how it's done." In politics, it's an art. I call it the art of politics. Experiencing it, in my view, lends a great deal of benefit to what we have to do in our report.

That's my personal view, Kathleen.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): For your information, I believe there's an election occurring in New Zealand on September 17. I was speaking to my daughter there this morning. I don't know whether that's a good thing in terms of trying to talk to politicians or whether it makes the experience better, seeing it actually in process. But just for your information, there is an election—

Mr. Patten: Can I add a comment? I'd like to underline what you were just saying, Madam Chair. You can read information, you can listen to a presentation, but the fact is that people learn not just through reading, which is an intellectual exercise; they learn through their visual, through their interaction with other people. And when you see and talk to people who are affected in a whole variety of ways, whether it's the politicians, whether it's the electorate, whether it's the people operating the electoral system, that is retained. That gives you another sort of feel for what is really going on there.

I've become friends with a member of the Legislature in BC, and let me tell you, what comes out in the news and what he will tell me about what is actually happening, the strengths and the weaknesses, are decidedly different. So there is an import, in my opinion and my life experience, to be able to talk to people face to face in a non-formal—you do it in a formal manner, but in a non-formal manner as well because that's where you get some of the real guts of the issues, of what happens, that isn't necessarily explicitly identified or talked about on an official basis.

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I'm going to jump in here because I'm just subbing in today, so I will not be taking part in any of the travel. I thought maybe I could just put a word in here from what might be viewed as an outside or more objective viewpoint on this.

My experience in life and in many things is that the first-hand experience is by far the most valuable. Having people come here is useful, but you will only hear their viewpoints; you will only hear their voices. If you go there, you have the opportunity to experience first hand, to go and seek out other viewpoints and to see the dynamic in action, which is probably the most important. Time and time again, I always find that first-hand experience is by far the most valuable and meaningful.

The Chair: Thank you, Jennifer.

Welcome, Mr. Prue. I know that you had said you were going to be late and you were going to be at 9:30.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): No, you said you were going to be early, after I had made other appointments.

The Chair: That's right.

We basically had a very general discussion at the beginning, taking a look at the mandate. We're homing in now on the timeline that we have and the potential for the first three weeks in September as the window of opportunity to get our research done and the potential of travel. There was some question about whether travel is an assumption or whether we really needed to travel if we could get the benefit of the research without travel. We heard from members who suggest that there is great value in going to where the changes have already taken place or there is a different system. We've had those types of discussions on that. So that's where we're at.

I want to get back to this whole issue of the broad spectrum. This all has to be approved by the Board of Internal Economy. I really would like to work with consensus on this committee. I really would like to do that. You can tell me what you think about this.

The three-week opportunity that we have to be able to get this research done allows us to look at a few systems that evolved from ours—to mixed proportional and possibly the single transferable vote. The initial discussion started off with a need to understand our system and have experts come in to talk to us about our system, thus going to your comment, Mr. Sterling, about having people who have done analysis and have been observant of this process for a very long time. So the 1st and 2nd of September, in speaking with the clerk and the researcher, may be an opportunity to have our experts about our local system come in and speak to us as a committee.

The travel part of it would start immediately following, on the 3rd. Looking at the timeline, it would appear that one of the options is to go to Scotland because Scotland has the devolved Parliament and has mixed proportional; to be in Ireland, which has the single transferable vote; Germany has the longest-standing mixed proportional, and it evolved out of our first-past-the-post after the Second World War, and the rationale for it evolving. It would be a unique opportunity to go to New Zealand and actually be there for the last few days of the election and be there on election day and be able to see exactly how this mixed proportional plays out.

0940

There is also the approach to referenda that took place in New Zealand as well as in Scotland that I think would be valuable for us to look at. New Zealand took a two-pronged approach, versus what British Columbia did. We've also got an opportunity to meet with the equivalent to Elections Ontario—Elections Scotland, or the equivalent to that.

So that's kind of the broad brush, and that comes about looking at the restricted timeline. Any comments on that? That's the broad-brush approach for the three weeks.

Ms. Smith: Caroline, I just wanted to ask about the limitations on people's time. Since I understood I was going to be on the committee, I tried to keep August open. I understand people made commitments, but I was just wondering if the last week of August was available

for us. That would give us a little less strain on the travel time. I'm just asking.

The Chair: The last week of August: Is anybody—

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I'm not going to be available. I had made some arrangements before.

The Chair: This was why, Monique: We have to review the system here as well. We thought we would do that in that last week or in the first two days of September.

Ms. Smith: OK.

The Chair: We have to do that as well, and that takes time, but thanks for the suggestion—we do have a committee member missing.

I think I had Mr. Miller first and then Mr. Sterling.

Mr. Miller: Just a question in terms of what you've outlined: Scotland, Ireland, Germany, New Zealand. Have you proposed how you would actually physically do it? Would you fly to Europe and then keep going? Is that what your plan would be?

The Chair: It would be three weeks on the road, and it's my preference that we, as a committee, do this together. There has been some suggestion that some people go here and some people go there, but I think it's important that we, as a committee, get the same information, that we experience the same places and that we do it as a unit.

Interjection.

The Chair: The researcher was just telling me that from the 3rd to the 17th is two weeks, not three weeks. Again, I'm looking at three weeks; let's keep three weeks open in case there are other areas.

Mr. Miller: It's a long way, so I would suggest it's probably a wise idea. If it's possible, can I also suggest that if you're going to New Zealand, you go to Australia as well, where they have the instant runoff voting system, which they've had in place since 1919.

The Chair: Again, this all has to be approved by the Board of Internal Economy. I'll certainly note that suggestion. I don't know what the distance is between New Zealand and Australia. I don't know if it's doable.

Mr. Patten: You'd probably have to go through Australia in any case, if you're going to New Zealand.

The Chair: I'm sure the clerk will look at all these details for us for the next meeting.

Does anybody have an issue with that broad spectrum, or does anybody have other suggestions?

Mr. Sterling: I think it's important for us not to lay out expectations as to what we can achieve by November 3. It's really a very, very short time frame. We're going to try our hardest and work very diligently at producing something as meaningful as we possibly can. I would really like not to do away with August in total. I'm sure Mr. Miller and I, for instance, from our party, can arrange our particular schedules where at least one of us would be present at a presentation or some discussion that would take place, in going forward with perhaps Mr. Johnston, the researcher, and some other people who might want to have some kind of say. The other part is, I

don't know how much of this we are going to put on a Web site, and I suggest that members of the committee can participate and become knowledgeable through a Web site, in terms of the material that's presented etc.

I really think that, heading toward November 3 and putting committee members in the best position to take advantage of visiting other jurisdictions and asking the right questions when they're there, some more preliminary work should be done during the month of August, even if it conflicts with some of our schedules. We won't be making motions during that period of time and it will be more of an information-gathering process. So I would really like to start as early as we possibly can.

The Chair: I don't want to give the impression that August was written off in the context of work. We will have a number of materials that we will have to—because one of the issues that I think we have is to learn even the terminology. There are a lot of these systems where we do not really even understand the acronyms. Again, one of the things we are doing is providing some detailed background here, and I'm hoping that the month of August—at least a few weeks in August—will be used for us to be able to better understand these various systems. We're going to have to do a lot of reading before we embark on this journey. We're also going to have to do homework in August; basically, that's what it's about, as well as the opportunity to have presenters the first week in September. So I don't want to give the impression that we're going to be just sitting there waiting for September to come about. We will have a lot of reading to do and a lot of research material that has some detailed background that we need to understand before we embark on this.

Ms. Wynne: Can I just follow up on what Mr. Sterling said? If we take the example of the criteria in the paper that we've got, there are examples from four different sources. I would think that it would be a really good idea, at some point, for either all of us or at least as many of us as possible to have a discussion about those principles or criteria and really hash it out. I guess some of that will happen as we travel, but it's also a preliminary piece in terms of it actually creating the lens through which we're looking at our own system and other systems. So that's some of the thinking that needs to happen ahead of time. Will we go in on September 1 not having had any of that conversation? That would be the advantage of trying to find some time in August when we could have some of that conversation.

The Chair: There's certainly an opportunity, even in the first week of August, after we've decided. We had to get the subcommittee done today, we had to look at the broad timeline, and then we'll start to do some of the details. You're absolutely right: We have to lay that foundation before we move forward and do the travelling. We have to have an understanding of why we want that criteria so that we know what it is at the end of the day we're going to try to achieve. It is a narrow timeline, so we have to be very disciplined in that.

Again, the other part of it is that even in the last week of August, maybe we can include some more sessions in

there, even though I know that we're going to be missing. We won't be doing any travelling, but we can put some time in there. So we will schedule probably another two or three meetings before that process begins.

Ms. Smith: Just in that vein, as I look through the discussion paper that Larry presented to us today, I was wondering about getting some of the people in who have been the authors of some of this background information. I wondered if I could ask Larry: Where is IDEA, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, located?

0950

Mr. Johnston: I think it's in Stockholm.

Ms. Smith: OK. I was wondering about Andrew Ellis, and I also wondered who had written the Law Reform Commission of Canada's report on democratic change.

Mr. Johnston: There were a number of people involved. Brian Tanguay, I think, is one who did an initial draft. There's also a senior researcher for the law reform commission, but I can't remember the name right now. It's Bittle or somebody; I'm not sure. There were several people involved. But that's a good resource document for finding experts to address the committee.

Ms. Smith: OK. That was my suggestion. I agree with the others who've spoken who said that we need some background. I appreciate that we need to do our reading, but you know what it's like, Caroline: It's kind of like writing that final exam; you don't do your reading until you have to. As I sit up here in North Bay, where it's 22 degrees and lovely today—I've left my reading probably at the cottage, but I will do it. I just think that if we know we have experts coming and we know we have to be prepared to speak to them to get the information we need, we'll be a little more focused.

Ms. Wynne: The law reform commission folks are very willing to come and do that kind of thing. They're going across the country talking to people, so they would be very accessible to us.

The Chair: What we can do is have a list of experts, if you want, or suggestions. If people on the committee have any suggestions of experts whom you think would be valuable for us to hear, then we should set time aside. You have to give them time, too. You can't just say, "We want you here next week or in two weeks." That's the issue. That was the other reason for the end of August or the beginning of September possibly, because they just aren't able to come suddenly. If we could get some suggestions from the committee as to who, as experts—as I said, Norm already mentioned someone to come before the committee—and others, then maybe we can become educated with the reading as well as with the presenters who are going to come before us.

Ms. Smith: My other suggestion that I'm really interested in is that I think our goal is to engage more people in the electoral process. We want to make it more relevant for people; we want more people to participate in democracy—at least, that has been my assumption. Maybe I'm wrong; maybe we need a discussion on that, too. To that end, I would like to hear from perhaps a

research polling firm that has done some work—I'm not saying we engage somebody to do this; I think it has been done—on electoral participation and why people are disengaging and in fact how dramatic the drop-off has been in electoral participation over the years. That's just something Larry might be familiar with, or someone else in our research group. I'd like to have some information around the context in Ontario and Canada, and then compare us with other democracies: Has there been a similar type of drop-off? Have there been changes that have improved that, or not? Then we'll look at what the impacts have been of the changes and democratic renewal in those jurisdictions that we're looking at.

The Chair: OK. That's great. Our researcher will provide some material for that as well, or some suggestions.

Mr. Sterling: My bent is toward getting people who have been somewhat engaged in the process or, as the Chair said, some practitioners involved in our part in this debate. I'm not that interested in listening to intellectual political scientists talk about the nuances of this or that. I would like to get people who perhaps were engaged either in a bureaucratic sense in the political system: former cabinet ministers, or, as Mr. Segal was, former secretary to the cabinet, and somewhat politically involved. I'd like to get practitioners in front of us who have what I would call an intellectual approach to the pushes and pulls that are likely to occur when and if we change our system.

We can get all kinds of political scientists in front of us. They want to change the world and want to argue the nuances of this or that. I'm not certain that they are the people who have the contact with the electorate, with the bureaucracy, with the powers that exist in our system or the centres of powers of our existing system and where those powers are likely to land if you choose another system. Those are the people I want to hear from and talk about so that we can give a heads-up, perhaps, to this citizens' committee as to what the likely outcome from a practitioner's point would be.

The Chair: Our mandate doesn't specifically say that we're going to provide the criteria for the citizens' assembly; that's not part of it.

I believe we have to have a balance, and I believe what Monique was saying was—having a polling firm, for instance, Elections Ontario—I agree, practitioners, and people like Jeffrey Simpson, for instance, a journalist who has watched our political system for years and years. So I think we need a combination of all. I do agree with you that I don't want to see it too weighted with just academics or only practitioners. We have to hear across that spectrum.

Ms. Smith: Two points. Sorry; I don't think Mr. Sterling understood. I'm not advocating for a bunch of political scientists either. I actually wanted polling research, because I think it's more practical to tell us why people were turned off or turned on or why they're walking away.

Also, I just wondered if someone in the room could tell me if Mr. Sterling was smiling when he said that Hugh Segal was somewhat politically involved.

The Chair: He is now.

Ms. Smith: Thank you.

The Chair: We will, then, try to attain a cross-section of presenters, including practitioners, political scientists, the experts who are there in various sectors such as polling firms, as well as Elections Ontario, to come before us to give us the lay of the land when it comes to our electoral system. Is everyone in agreement with that?

Ms. Wynne: Yes.

The Chair: We will begin this process at the end of August, beginning of September.

Mr. Patten: I have a suggestion. We're dealing with two things. We're kind of dealing with schedule and content at the same time. The shorter element really, in my opinion, can be—I think each of us has some background and some analysis already done, so that rather quickly we should be saying, "What are the strengths and weaknesses of our own system?" I think that should be pulled together in short order, and I think this is where committee research can help us and say, "Listen, here's what's been identified in terms of the weakness of the existing system." We build on that, which then should lead us to what we're looking for in terms of building upon or ameliorating or improving existing systems. Then we look at things. But it should help us with our criteria. I'm suggesting that's the first step, but that step should not carry on indefinitely, in my opinion. That should be the one that's done most quickly.

The Chair: Thank you, Richard. The intent is to get the review of our current system done before we do any travelling. I really appreciate your suggestion and I believe it is possible for us to get at least a background perspective of our system.

Is it in your background material here?

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Mr. Johnston: In the research paper that you received, I did not do a systematic pros and cons of the system because I didn't want to prejudge the work of the committee. In the paper you received today with the criteria, the appendices do provide analysis of first-past-the-post by each of those four bodies—the people's assembly, the Jenkins commission, the royal commission in New Zealand and the law reform commission—and each of those assesses first-past-the-post in terms of its strengths and weaknesses. So there are some other bodies providing that for us. If you want me to summarize the existing literature and pull it all together, I'm happy to do that.

Mr. Patten: That would be helpful.

Mr. Johnston: OK.

Ms. Wynne: Can I just comment on that? So, Larry, what we've got here are four descriptions of the current system, of first-past-the-post, in the paper you've given us. Right?

Mr. Johnston: Four evaluations, I would say.

Ms. Wynne: Evaluations. OK. But those bodies were able to do evaluations because they had criteria against which to measure the system.

I guess, Richard, what you're asking for is basically an evaluation, but we haven't decided as a group the criteria against which we'd be measuring the current system.

Mr. Patten: That would be the next step.

Ms. Wynne: OK. My brain works this way: If I'm going to say that something is good or bad, I need to know what the standard is or what criteria I'm using. I'm just worried we're asking Larry to do something, to make an evaluation of a system, and we haven't told him what our values are as a group. So I see the criteria-setting—I think a good description of what we have now, a good analysis, a more descriptive than prescriptive or judgmental evaluation.

Is a description what you're looking for, Richard?

Mr. Patten: I'm thinking that there have been bodies and groups and institutes that have already done an analysis. Let's pull that together in summary form and say, "Listen, most of them tend to conclude that participation is going down. Most of them tend to conclude that you're not getting"—whatever it is. We can then talk about criteria and say, "OK, we think we want to address these," and we can build our criteria somewhat based on that. Our criteria are in our own minds as we examine it, but I'm just saying, there's a lot of analysis and work that has been done. Why don't we summarize it and use that as a jumping-off point to fine-tune our own criteria as we go forward to look at other systems?

Ms. Wynne: The only point I'm making is that we have some of that in the paper that Larry has given us.

Mr. Patten: Yes, I know.

Ms. Wynne: Yes, OK.

The Chair: Thank you. So I would like to look at the dates. At the end of August, beginning of September, the dates that we were looking at are September 1 and 2 for sure, to have hearings here, to listen to some of the experts for those two days, and/or the beginning of that week. September 1 and 2 are a Thursday and Friday, and then, working back, the last two days of August.

Mr. Miller: August 30 and 31 are fine from my perspective, and August 25 and 26 are fine as well.

The Chair: The 25th is a Sunday, but that's OK. You're eager.

Ms. Smith: No, Thursday and Friday.

The Chair: Oh, sorry; it is. Why don't we tentatively set up, then, the 29th, 30th and 31st? How many days do we really need? Two or three days?

Mr. Prue: I'm not available on the 29th.

The Chair: You can't? OK.

Mr. Prue: I can do the 30th and 31st, and the 1st and 2nd.

The Chair: OK. August 30 and 31, and September 1 and 2. We'll block off those four days and we will fit in there experts on the current system to come before us. Is that fair?

Mr. Patten: Yes.

The Chair: OK. So that's done.

Mr. Miller: The four days, again, are the 30th and 31st, and the 1st and 2nd.

The Chair: We may be able to do that in two or three days rather than all four, but I want the four days blocked off, that's all. I think it would be prudent for us to do that. OK?

Ms. Wynne: Can I just ask another timing question? The Labour Day weekend, then, is the weekend that comes at the end of that, and we can assume that the Friday to the Monday—it's just that I have to go and pick up a child on the east coast. So we can assume that the Friday to the Monday we won't be having meetings? Is that right? What's the Friday of that?

Ms. Smith: That's the 2nd.

Ms. Wynne: Is that the 2nd? If I leave on the 2nd, then I'm back by the Monday.

The Chair: We may be starting the travel on that weekend.

Ms. Wynne: Oh, we're leaving on the Labour Day weekend?

The Chair: Yes, we may be starting the travel then.

Ms. Wynne: OK. Then I won't go to the east coast to get my daughter.

Mr. Miller: Is the time frame so tight that we need to start the travel on the Labour Day weekend?

The Chair: I think it is that tight, if we want to be in New Zealand for that election. We thought this through in the sense of timing.

Mr. Miller: It's a long way.

The Chair: It is. So we can't do it. You know, you can't come back here and go back there, so that's why it was thought through. It's the only way that we're going to be able to be on time for this report. We have a chance of being on time.

Mr. Prue: May I ask, when is election day in New Zealand?

The Chair: The 17th.

Mr. Prue: September 17; OK.

Mr. Patten: What are the outside dates you're talking about, when we'd be back?

The Chair: Probably the week after that, at some point in time. We may, at your suggestion, attempt to go to Australia, which would mean coming back here possibly the 24th.

Mr. Patten: That knocks us out for a month.

The Chair: No, that's three weeks and a day. If you leave on the 2nd and you add 21 days, it's the 23rd. We have to confirm that. It depends on—

Mr. Patten: No, I know, but I have some important dates in there that I keep moving. I need to know.

The Chair: We will attempt to firm this up ASAP. Do I have, then, the agreement of the committee that the first three weeks in September—I'll just ask one more time—we will use for our research travel? OK.

The next part is, in our report that we will be providing, do we want to actually make recommendations on the viability of each system, sort of doing the pros and cons of each system? Is that really what we would like to do?

Mr. Prue: I'm not sure of the question. How it affects them, how it works out there, or how it would work here?

The Chair: No, no, how it works there, how we perceive it—

Interjection.

The Chair: OK. There you go. Absolutely. Thank you.

It says here—let's read this through, and then we can interpret it in the same way—to “make recommendations on the viability of each alternative electoral system reviewed, taking into consideration the impact such alternatives may have on gender equality, full representation of Ontario's populace and the number and method of elected MPPs.” So it would be in the context of how it would impact here.

Mr. Prue: I wouldn't want to comment on New Zealand's form of government, whether they had chosen a good thing, or they think they have.

The Chair: It's always in reference to how it would impact us.

Mr. Prue: I think we're in enough trouble with the Danes right now, without making some others angry too.

The Chair: So we will make recommendations on that viability. We will do that, then.

Mr. Sterling: I think that's the way we should start, but in the end, we want to consider how we present the final report when we get there. What we should try to do is ask, what is the impact of this change on the electorate, what is the impact on minority or gender equality? Also, what is the impact on the Legislative Assembly—

The Chair: Oh, yes.

Mr. Sterling: —as it would be constituted? What is the impact on the cabinet of Ontario? What is the impact on the premiership of the province?

I think Mr. Prue was alluding to it, perhaps, that from the practitioner's standpoint, it's important for us to express what is the likely outcome of the power structure if we go this way or that way. That's the part that I think is lost on the public, perhaps, if they get diverted too much into how we elect the members and not what is the likely effect of making those choices.

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The Chair: The reason I asked the question is because on the actual motion it says that the committee “may make recommendations on the viability of each alternative electoral system reviewed, taking into consideration” those impacts. So that's why I asked the question, because it isn't the committee “shall”; it's the committee “may.” I think it is useful to do that, actually, because then we can have some discussion about how it might impact—you're absolutely right—our Legislature, our representation here in the Legislature and so on, all of those matters.

Mr. Sterling: I think the other important one—and we're going to find this in New Zealand—is that originally, as I understand it, in New Zealand there was a promise that the public would have another referendum to go back to their original system, and the politicians liked the new system but perhaps the public is less enamoured with it than the politicians. The portrayal to me has been that the politicians pulled the rug from under the

populace as to the second option of going back to their old system. I think it's important for us to try to get a feeling as to the referendum, the percentages required—we know what happened in BC—and what guarantees there are to the people—can they go backwards?—as well as the options into the future.

I think that's really important because you're talking about a system that's 140 years old and there are lots of warts on our system, but you have to be careful how you go forward on these things. Once you strike a citizens' committee there's going to be an awful tendency for them to come up with revamping the world. If I was put on a citizens' committee, I would take this as a great honour for me to change history. The likelihood is that they will want to change, and as radically as possible. I think that's human nature.

I think that all of those things are really important: What is the referendum, when is the referendum, how binding is it, what is the ability of the populace to reverse engines if they should decide, after they've tried this thing out, that they don't like it?

The Chair: Just before I go to Mr. Miller, it does say, “The committee shall consider the procedure for the referendum to be held following a review of electoral reform by a citizen assembly.” So this is also an opportunity to do that, to do an analysis of how these referendums were held, what approaches were taken and, again, to be able to evaluate to some degree that process.

Mr. Miller: Perhaps I could ask research whether in fact it is the case, as Mr. Sterling has been stating, that in New Zealand the politicians actually changed the terms of the referendum once they had their new system in place. Are you aware of that?

Mr. Johnston: What I'm aware of is that there was a promise that the system would be reviewed after a certain number of years—I believe it was five years—and I gather it passed the review at a time when people were unhappy with the system. There were a lot of mitigating factors that were involved here and it occurs to me that the committee might benefit from a background briefing on each of the countries or systems that it's going to visit before we go there, just to provide some context. I'd be happy to arrange for that if the committee so wishes.

Mr. Miller: Yes, I think that would probably be worthwhile.

As I mentioned previously, my daughter happens to be in New Zealand right now, so I've asked her informally to ask the people she bumps into how they feel about their current system. Surprisingly, one of the comments she made was that the people felt they were going to be able to go back to the old system if they didn't like it, and now they find they can't. The people she is informally speaking to aren't too happy with the new system.

The Chair: The other item that I have, basically—we'll do the procedure on the referendum. I think we've discussed everything I had for now; we did the travel, the timeline.

I don't know if anybody feels we need another discussion next week. I think we have to get all the infor-

mation that the researcher is going to get to us. But I need to know if the committee wishes the subcommittee on committee business to meet and finalize the discussions held today, including committee travel. The decisions would be circulated to the full committee by a subcommittee report, and the report would be adopted at the first subsequent committee meeting. It just means we don't have to meet as a whole committee to make some of those decisions. The decisions would be arrived at, but they wouldn't be approved until the next—

Ms. Wynne: So you need a subcommittee meeting, basically?

The Chair: I'm suggesting that if the committee wishes the subcommittee to look at some of these details—just to iron out some of the details.

Mr. Patten: Good. I think you need to hammer out some of that stuff.

Mr. Sterling: I would really like the subcommittee to be able to start asking various people to come to the committee, because, as you say, you're not going to be able to ask somebody to come tomorrow. If that was delegated to the subcommittee, I think that might be good, and to try to come up with a list of people we would like to invite to talk to us and try to set some dates when that would happen.

I'd like to also be able to have the subcommittee perhaps set up with Mr. Johnston, our researcher, some briefing sessions and try to schedule those as best we can to try to capture as many members of the committee as possible.

If the Chair wants to call a meeting to confirm that, that's fine, but because of the short time frame, I think we've got to start.

The Chair: Yes, we have to finalize these. The researcher will have some suggestions as well.

Maybe the subcommittee can meet next Wednesday.

Ms. Smith: Caroline, I'm in town on Tuesday, if we could do it Tuesday.

The Chair: OK. On Tuesday?

Mr. Prue: I can't come.

The Chair: Michael can't be here on Tuesday.

Could the subcommittee make decisions via teleconference?

Ms. Smith: I'll find out this afternoon if I can switch to Wednesday.

The Chair: What's Wednesday like, Mr. Prue?

Mr. Prue: I can't, because I'm on a flight from Regina back to Toronto on Wednesday, and I don't know how I can teleconference either.

The Chair: Are you here on Thursday—possibly Thursday morning?

Mr. Prue: I'm here all day on Thursday.

The Chair: Mr. Sterling?

Mr. Sterling: What's the date?

The Chair: We'll confirm that to finalize these decisions.

Ms. Smith: I couldn't hear Mr. Sterling. Are we looking at the 4th, then?

Mr. Sterling: Is that OK with you, Monique?

Ms. Smith: I'll look at my schedule and try to switch my flight to come in later in the week.

The Chair: I really want to thank everybody.

Mr. Patten: Madam Chair, just one other little anecdote: The most recent experience in Canada is BC, and we haven't really talked about that. I wonder if we want someone from there to come in, or whether we could drop by on the way back. It's a fresh experience. BC is the most recent experience. They've had a very complicated experience, and there might be some value in certainly learning from what they've gone through.

The Chair: We'll find a way to access information to have an opportunity to discuss it, one way or another, Richard.

Mr. Patten: When we're flying back we go through BC anyway, so there's another thought.

The Chair: I need one other aspect here. It's a question. Does the committee agree that the subcommittee on committee business be given the authority to approve a budget for the select committee and to present the budget to the Board of Internal Economy for its approval?

Mr. Patten: Sure. It had better.

Ms. Wynne: Will we see the budget first?

The Chair: Yes, we can certainly do that.

Any questions? All right, until next time. Thank you again. I think this is going to be an exciting venture. I'm certainly excited about it, and I'm excited to have you all on board. Thank you to the subs.

The committee adjourned at 1023.

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